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REMINISCENCES OF A MERRY ART-SCHOOL

BY MARGUERITE TRACY

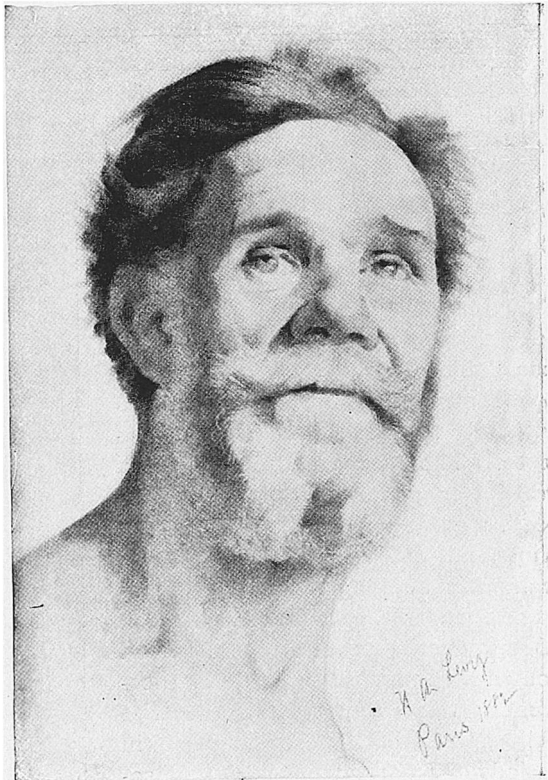
With original illustrations by students of the Metropolitan School of Fine Arts.

THE old Academy of Design in its early days never battled more valiantly than the Metropolitan School of Fine Arts for the right of every free-born American institution to life, liberty and the pursuit of wisdom. Rarely composed of more than a handful of students, beset by every difficulty, and swept out of existence time and again by controversies and other circumstances beyond its control, it prospers to-day in firm testimony of the immemorial saying that "vouloir c'est pouvoir."



The story of its life is like a romance, and deserves more permanent record than the verbal telling by persons concerned. That certain facts will find themselves inadvertently omitted in such a record is, however, almost inevitable, and as they seem too charming to be lost I tell them here.

My acquaintance with the school dates back of its present ideal quarters in Carnegie Music Hall to the old rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art from which it took its name, and from which it has since borrowed much of its equipment. The very ground on which the trustees of the Museum determined to disband it in 1894, namely, that it was too small and unimportant to pay for the expense and care of running it, was its chief charm. There were but four students in the room which I have in mind; four drawing-boards, four stools and two little spirit-lamps; two of the students were girls and two boys. On cold winter days, when the trees in Central Park looked cheerless enough from the windows, each girl made two little cups of chocolate, and often the bread that should have erased false charcoal-marks was turned to as good if not better account at luncheon. By the time the school closed, and the trees in the park were green, two little engagements were added to the gen-



Drawn by Herbert A. Levy

A SKETCH

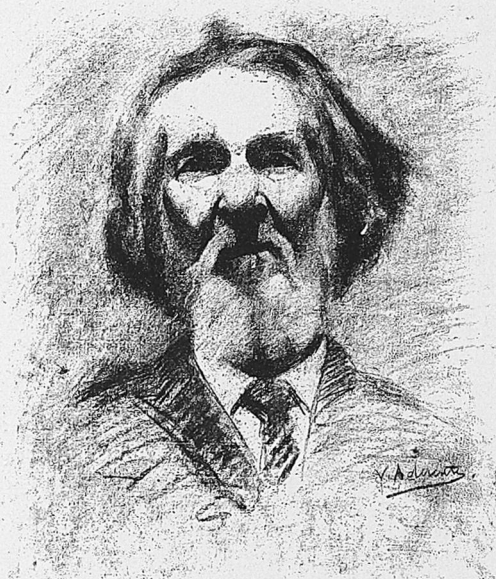
Reminiscences of a Merry Art-School

eral account of credit and loss in the social world, and further than these it is not the purpose of this article to go. Some one recently wrote a short story called "A Landscape by Constable," and although the plot was laid abroad it recalled to me the true, unconscious, and altogether captivating student-life at the Metropolitan School, in a way that no other art-story has ever done. Perhaps there was more of the individual atmosphere of French schools there, than is to be found about the Academy or the Art Student's League.



Drawn by Alice Morlan

AN HOUR'S PRACTICE

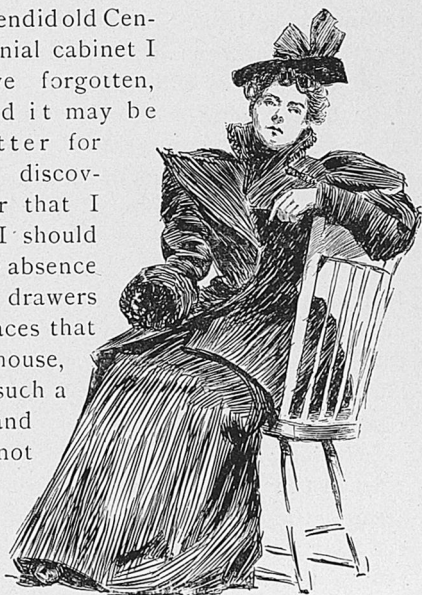


Drawn by Vincent Adreite

A PORTRAIT-STUDY

The fine old Museum afforded resources and opportunities for scrapes of which the less fortunately situated Academy and League students could not dream. To whose ingenuity the Metropolitan students were indebted for the solution of the problem of the secret drawers in the splendid old Centennial cabinet I have forgotten, and it may be better for the discoverer that I

have, and still best for the world at large that I should not reveal the way in which it is practicable, in the absence of the guard, to make numberless fascinating drawers and cubby holes of every form spring open in places that seem carved of solid wood. The storage-warehouse, the repository for treasure and billet-doux, that such a cabinet affords, among persons who understand and appreciate it, would be past belief to anyone not thoroughly acquainted with the genus art-student. I am speaking of days long past, and it would be the height of unwisdom for anyone to venture to explore the cabinet for relics or trophies of the school. It would be easier to open a bank-safe without the combination than



Drawn by Robert Stearns

A SHORT CALL

the Centennial cabinet without the clue, and the adventurer would find himself—by the time the guard noticed him—lowered in his own esteem almost as much as in that of the Museum's officials.

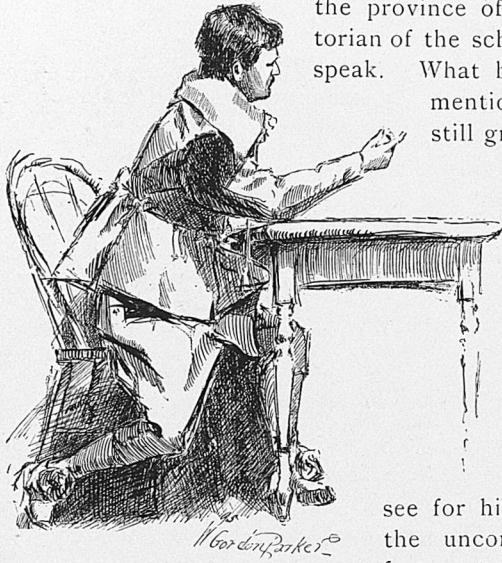
These, I repeat, are things of which it may not come into

the province of a historian of the school to speak. What he will mention, and at still greater length than is possible for me, is the excellent work that the school is putting forth, notwithstanding all its merry healthful frivolity, and which any one may

see for himself who has the uncommonly good fortune to be invited to the reception held on the

last Saturday afternoon of each month. The visitor will incidentally be required to spend an hour before the close in sketching from a model in some picturesque costume, after which there will be criticism of the work. This is a unique feature of this school. The reception is held in the great "student's room," the central rallying-place of the students in their new building. It fronts on Seventh Avenue, and is provided with everything that an almost unbohemian love of comfort can suggest.

Nothing can show the buoyancy and determined steadfastness of the school better than the way in which a few of the students came together when the trustees of the Metropolitan had closed



Drawn by W. Gordon Parker
AN ARGUMENT



Drawn by F. Moses
A COSTUME-POSE

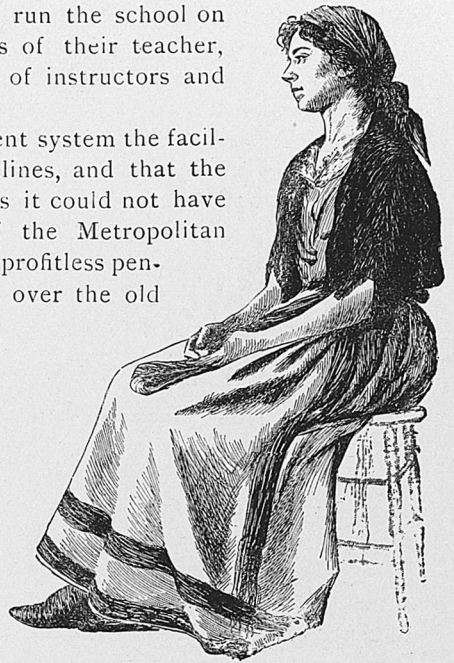


Drawn by B. West Clinedinst
HOUSEHOLD CARES

their studies, and resolved to reorganize and run the school on coöperative principles, retaining the services of their teacher, Herbert A. Levy, and adding to the number of instructors and instructions.

There can be no doubt that under the present system the facilities for advancement are laid along broader lines, and that the school will flourish in Carnegie Music Hall as it could not have done among the unavoidable limitations of the Metropolitan Museum, but I cannot help lingering, with the profitless penchant of a dreamer for days that are gone, over the old Museum haunts where there were few scholars and less system, and the world was a very care-free, unimportant place, and where the governing principles seemed to be like those expressed by a wise old model: "Trust in the Lord and draw straight."

Each generation of students feels that the administration under which it studied was the best and merriest, and I have heard grave and distinguished artists recalling years of which only the pleasant memories are left—memories of attending a midnight mass at Notre Dame, and of carefully and systemat-



Drawn by J. A. Allen

A PICTURESQUE DRESS



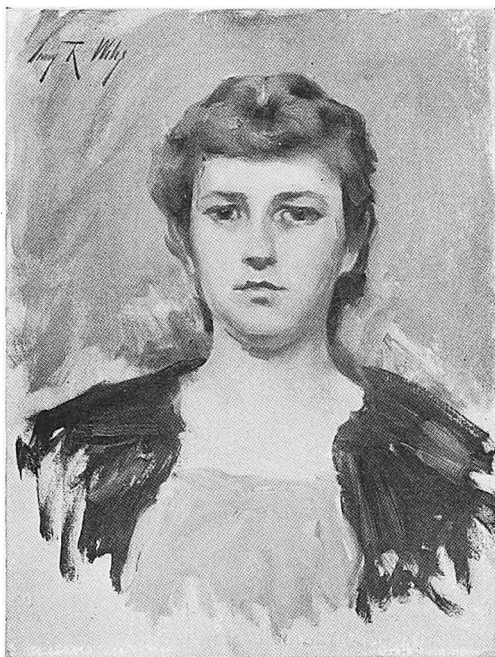
Drawn by Alice Morlan

A FRIENDLY CRITICISM

ically pinning together the coats, shawls and dresses of the men and women who thronged the aisles around them; just as the students of to-day will recall the little twenty-five-cent casts which they grouped among the flower-boxes outside the window of the dignified Society of American Artists during the exhibition of the National Sculpture Society, placarded, "Imitation is the highest form of praise."

The art-student life of twenty years ago seems so much more picturesque than that of more recent years. Students are more conventional now (it is not being laid up against them by the world at large), and this laudable change is of course to be attributed to the regenerating influence of the girl student.

Twenty years ago a young gentleman who had embraced the career



From a painting by Irving R. Wiles

A PORTRAIT BEGUN



Fragment from a painting by C. S. Reinhart

TAKING NOTES CONCERNING THE WRECK



From a painting by Fannie Louise Hoyt
SOMEBODY'S SISTER

then put his stockings on again outside of his shoes and started on merrily, singing in a tremendous baritone,

"A Yankee ship and a Yankee crew,
Yo! ho! roll a man down!"

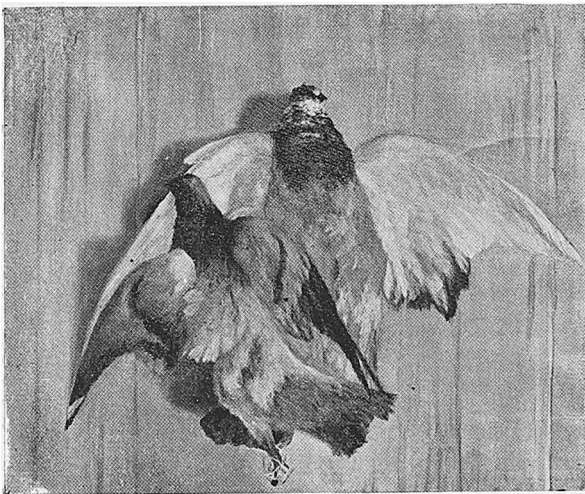
Who would do this on Fifth Avenue to-day?

It is certain that the art-student has reached a higher state of civilization; but I do maintain that it is

of art, went out a-calling during the most phenomenal sleet-storm that Paris ever knew. His way lay along a Boulevard Montparnasse as slippery as the straight and narrow path of fable, and observing this he seated himself on a doorstep, took off his shoes and stockings,



Drawn by Marian Woods Entz
AN INTERESTED POSER



From a painting by Isabel A. Lyons
PHEASANTS

as difficult to judge comparatively of those days and these as of the respective merits of ancient and modern methods of embalming. There are embalmers to-day who claim that their work is far superior and more enduring than that done in the time of the Pharaohs, but they are unable as yet to show us specimens of modern embalming two thousand years old, and therefore we shall continue to pin our faith to the Egyptians, confident that by the time the momentous question has been decided it will no longer interest us.